



THE TOWER KC

# SEEING THE NIGHT BLUELY

JAMES WOODFILL  
JOSÉ FAUS  
EL DORADO INC



TOP IMAGE:  
ARTIST'S RENDERING OF  
*SEEING THE NIGHT BLUELY*

LEFT IMAGE:  
VIEW FROM E 31st ST

RIGHT IMAGE:  
ORIGINAL LIGHTING OF  
THE TOWER (2004-2005)

MVSC, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

## OVERVIEW

In Kansas City, it is known simply as The Tower. It sits in the urban core, and for decades, The Tower provided the central beacon on our landscape. Erected in 1955, it was the tallest self-supporting tower in the world—it broadcast television to post-War suburbs, and marked long-standing racial dividing lines within the city. It carried messages that helped evolve our democracy, and amplified inequities.

Generations of Kansas Citians found their way home via the tower. It marked the passing of day to night; divided East from West, and North from South; it sat on a racial red line; and warned of weather to come. After 2001, it conveyed our country's colors. In 2010, it went dark.

This soaring object is profoundly linked to the city's identity. Despite its role in furthering the structural inequities of this place, it is a site that everyone in the city may claim ownership of—it is our Tower.

The project will record sky conditions each day, capturing color across the horizon and from dawn to dusk. Each night, The Tower will broadcast a record of the prior day. Perhaps only when presented with a memory of daylight can we see color for what it actually is, an experience rather than a property. In the same way, "Seeing the Night Bluely" offers common ground and a highly personal gesture.

Throughout the city, in collaboration with artists and communities of this richly diverse, yet hyper-segregated place, viewing and listening stations will invite dialogues that aspire to equity for Kansas City. The vision for this project is to create both a unifying signal, and distributed community assets that together activate the shared civic potential of the city.

**WE SEE OURSELVES IN  
THE TOWER. IT ALLOWS US  
TO ENVISION THE CITY  
TOGETHER.**



## PROJECT TEAM

### **JAMES WOODFILL**

lead artist, is an interdisciplinary artist based in Kansas City. His work focuses on direct experience through the composition of objects, occurrences, and site. His artworks bridge the fields of sculpture, painting and public art, and his work in the public realm has extended into education and curatorial projects, writings and numerous urban planning projects and studies. Woodfill's public work has been widely recognized, including numerous awards from the American Institute of Architects, and in the Americans for the Arts/Public Art Network annual "Year in Review." Woodfill is Professor in the Painting Department of the Kansas City Art Institute.

### **JOSÉ FAUS**

lead community engagement artist, is a socially engaged artist based in Kansas City. He works across painting, writing, performance, teaching, and community events focusing on public murals and community projects. He is currently developing and implementing art outreach activities for at-risk youth throughout Kansas City encouraging expression and dialogue as well as using art as a vehicle to build social skills and workforce training.

### **HESSE MCGRAW**

Hesse McGraw, project curator and artistic director, is a partner at el dorado inc. Hesse is a curator and writer, and most recently served as Vice President for Exhibitions and Public Programs at San Francisco Art Institute. His curatorial practice and arts organization leadership are acclaimed for shifting organizations into springboards that expand the agency of artists beyond the gallery. Through these collaborations, more than 50 curated exhibitions, and extensive public and educational programs, Hesse has powerfully shared the instrumental role of artists in igniting public imagination and animating our largest problems.

### **EL DORADO INC**

will serve as the primary project manager and coordinate efforts amongst the full project team. Established in 1996, el dorado is an architecture, urban design, curatorial, education, and fabrication practice based in Kansas City that chases big ideas

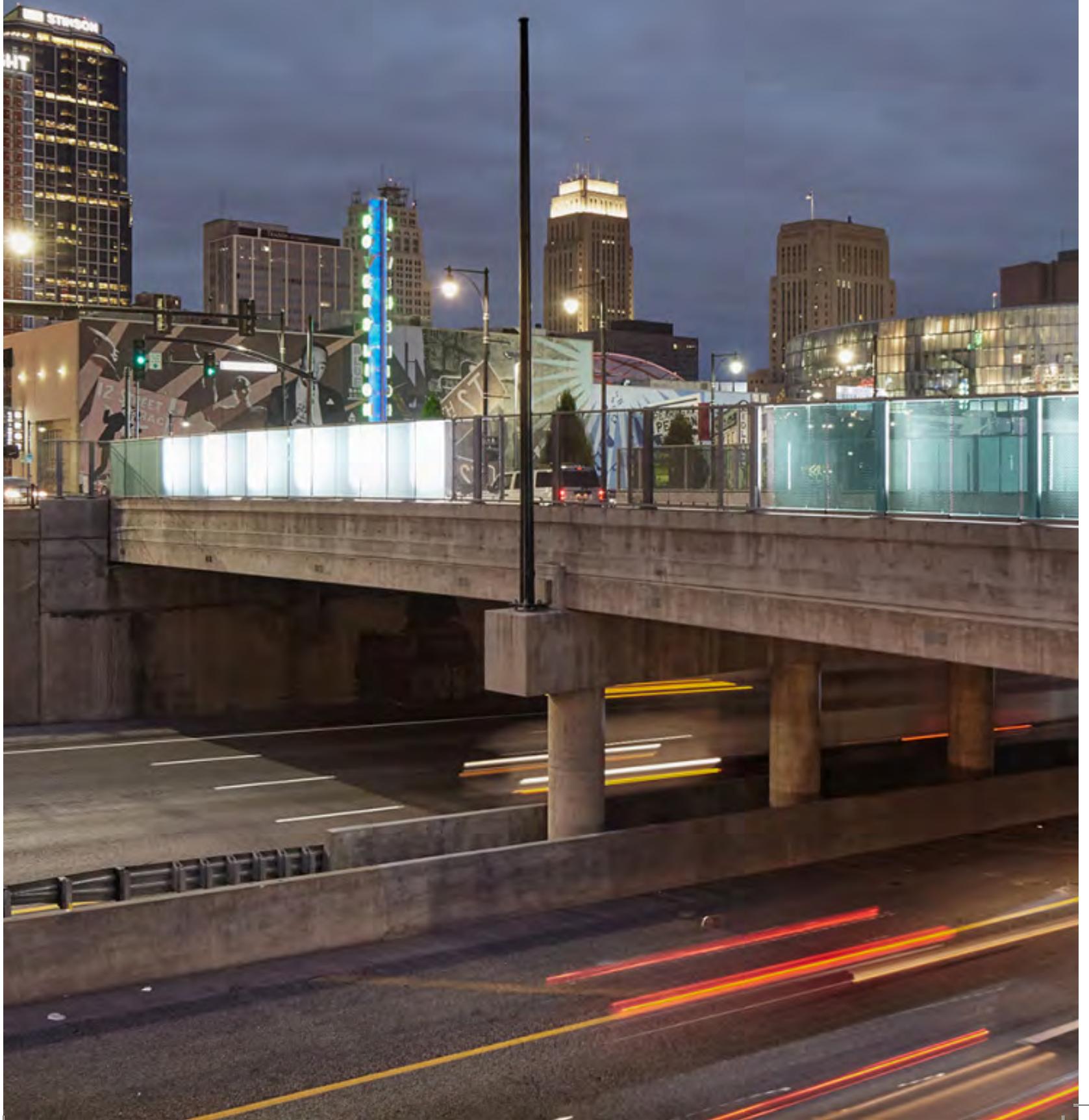
with a common touch. el dorado works purposefully across scales and contexts. From city blocks to exhibitions, between critical ideas and our intangible, spiritual attachment to place, el dorado seeks the catalytic potential of common ground.

### **JASPER MULLARNEY**

is founder and president of The Tower KC, Inc, a non-profit established with the mission to realize this project.

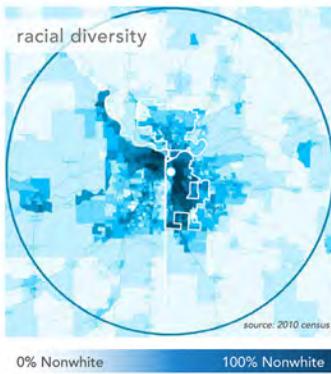
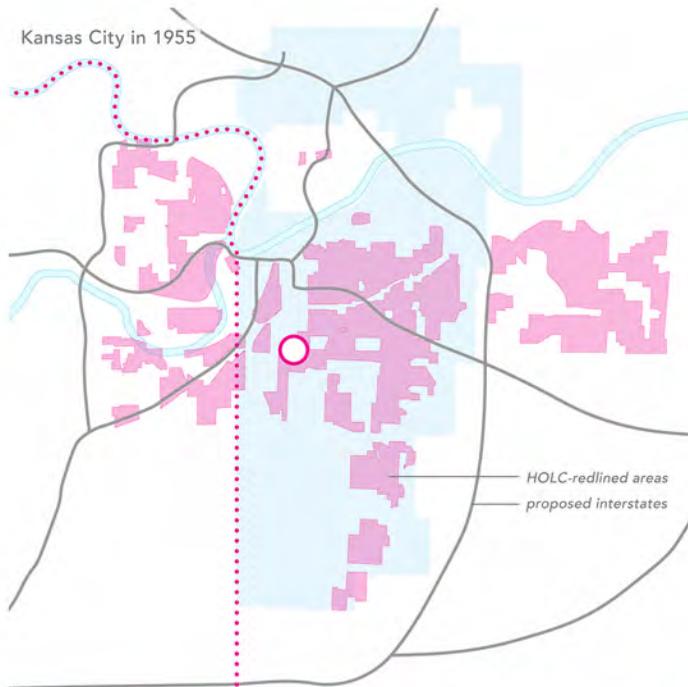
### **THE TOWER KC, INC**

was established as a 501(c)3 in 2016 for the purposes of pursuing and commissioning this project. Over the course of three years, The Tower KC has dedicated extensive effort to proving the feasibility of the project, securing commitments from project partners and collaborators, and initiating conversations with potential funders. Throughout this effort, The Tower KC has received very positive responses from multiple private institutions, foundations, and individuals who have indicated an interest and willingness to support the project. This support base includes local philanthropists, development corporations, individuals and charitable foundations from arts, social equity, and infrastructure sectors.

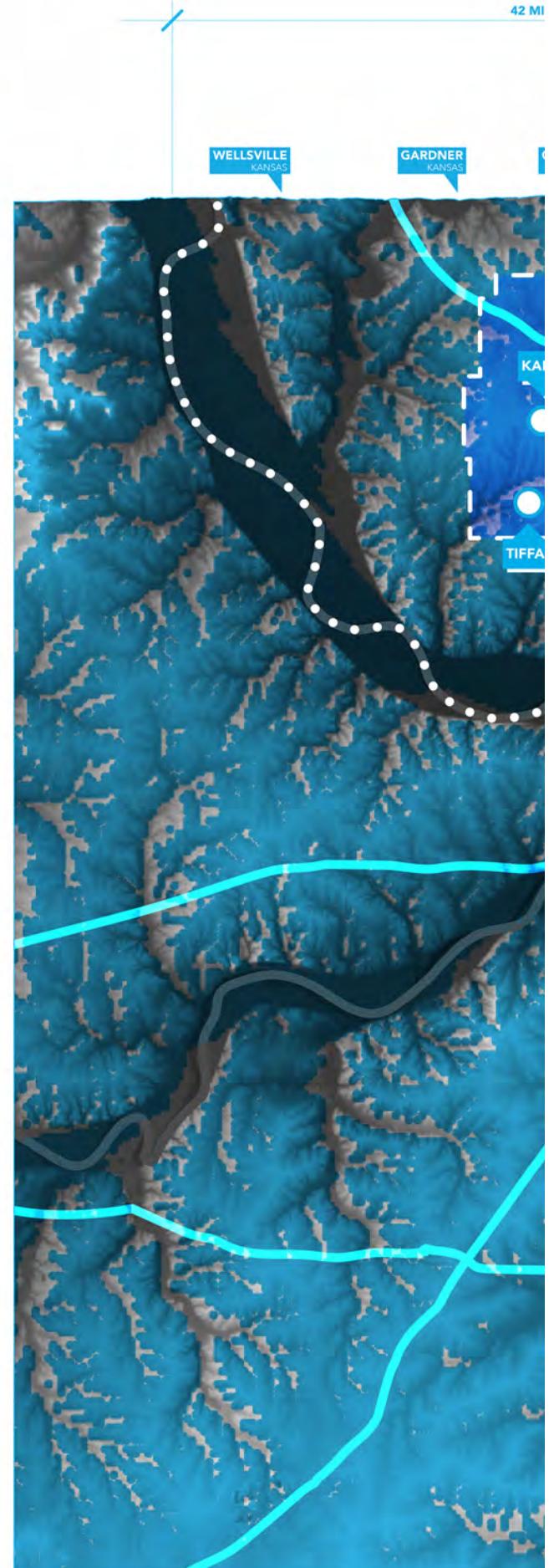


# SEEING THE NIGHT BLUELY

The tower is located adjacent to Kansas City's racial dividing line.



The tower's broadcast reach, along with the freeway system, stimulated white flight and urban sprawl.



42 MILES

42 MILES



# ENGAGEMENT

## AUDIENCE

The Tower was designed to achieve maximum possible audience. Built as the tallest free-standing tower in the world, at its launch it provided the broadest geographical reach for television and radio broadcasts in the world. We are keenly aware of the accompanying ironies — that reach, along with the freeway system, stimulated white flight and sprawl; the tower was sited alongside racial redline boundaries within the city; and yet its broadcasts, particularly during the Civil Rights era, advanced popular understanding of the evils of segregation.

This work adapts the physical structure of the tower to invert its broadcast — rather than dispersing information into individual viewer's homes, the project establishes a beacon that signals a new, unifying civic identity for the city.

Simultaneously, and equal to the transformation of the tower itself, is a direct engagement of the tower's full geographic reach and visibility throughout the city. In partnership with the Mayor's community relations divisions, Parks and Recreation, neighborhood and community groups throughout the city, the project team will develop "viewing stations" — benches, platforms, and framing devices that locally anchor the project.

This project is also designed to achieve the broadest possible audience, yet the work engages its audience through personal experience, collective agency in the identity of the city, and distributed agency in the communities that together comprise this specific place.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

This project is fundamentally driven by marketing and communication strategies. It begins with the oldest trick—use existing tools. As a mega-scale hack of the tower, the project leverages the largest existing communications resource in the city. Secondly, the project engages perhaps the lone thing anyone can discuss with anyone else—the weather. Yet, in recognizing that idle, agreeable discussion of daily weather is conjoined to a topic that deeply divides us—climate change—the project embraces wedges as the site to forge meaningful common ground. Additionally, this application represents our ambition to catalyze the communications resources of one of the largest communications companies on the globe—Meredith Corporation, the owner of the tower—as a partner in realizing a project that optimizes 20th century infrastructure to address urgent 21st century communications and community challenges.

» It is rooted in conversation. The project will be developed through extensive conversation and a "listening tour" that engages individuals and communities throughout the city to understand our current civic identity.

» It is highly analog and participatory. In Kansas City, everyone can see The Tower.

» It is physical and community-based. Viewing sites will be established throughout the city.

» Despite its height, this work is horizontal and distributed.

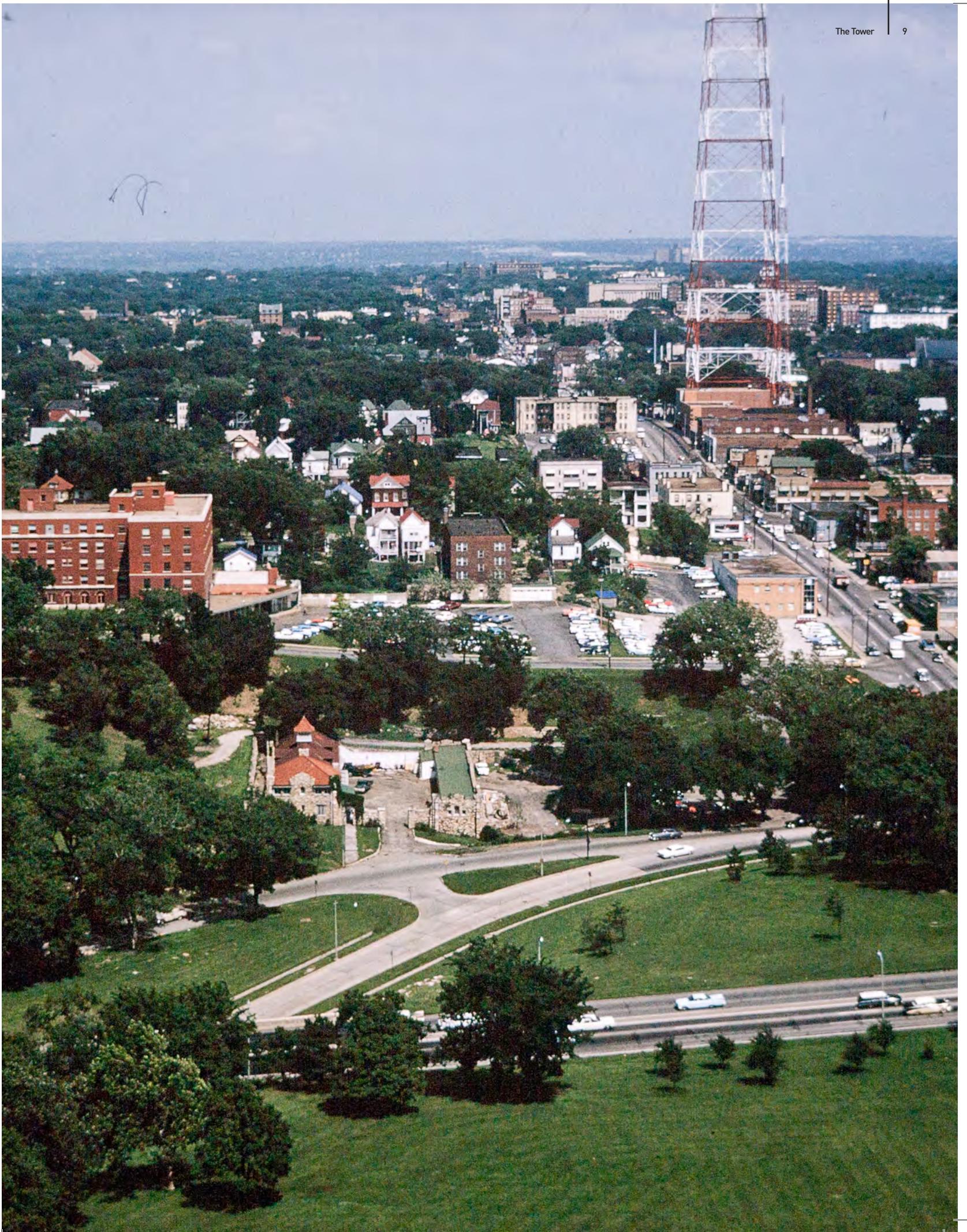
» The effective aspect ratio of the work is horizontal and spans the scale of the city.

» It is a broadcast device that changes daily. Imagine conversations beginning, 'Did you see the sky blue today?'

» Embrace the social, photo- and mediagenic aspects of this work

» Allow for and encourage branding through this image. We see ourselves through this artwork on our skyline.

In summary, our strategy is to embed the identity of project within mainstream and personal media—this work is driven by an artist bringing new thinking to our largest issues, it creates a new civic identity, and offers new ways to see ourselves in the city.



## OUTCOMES

This project integrates the typically distinct and contrary roles of the broadcast device and civic icon. The aim of a broadcast device is to reach as many people as possible, wherever they are; a civic edifice brings people together at a specific site and around a specific history. This work merges those efforts, and additionally grants personal agency in the collective identity of the city: color is a personal and shared experience, and our experience of the city is both individual and a product of the populace. If we aspire to equity, we must do it together. For this work to achieve an effective, and impactful symbol of equity, it must perform equitably in its production, and embrace the diverse perspectives and individual circumstances that make up the city.

### GOALS

- » Establish a signal of equity as the shared civic identity and icon for the city.
- » Illuminate issues of race and class that give form to the city.
- » Honor distinct neighborhoods and communities throughout the city.
- » Grant communities and neighborhoods individual agency with respect to this icon.
- » Broadcast that artists should be trusted.
- » Create new forms of common ground at the center of the city.

Kansas City might be the most perfectly American place in the United States. We are at the geographic center, and symbolically we sit in the middle of everywhere. As our nation experiences increasing inequities across race, class, and place; and our communications environment becomes increasingly atomized, and algorithmically tailored to reinforce individual perspectives, this project aspires to reverse those flows. Rather than solving those wicked problems, this project directly engages them on their own terms: at the center of our country, at a historic place of division, and through a broadcast tower, this project envisions a beacon of civic and civil unity.



## CONTACT

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